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ABSTRACT

Increasing numbers of students now attending college lack the reading and study skills necessary for mastery of content area material. One approach to solving this problem is using learning assistance personnel as consultants to content area instructors. Some specific reading and study techniques that learning assistance instructors can help content area instructors adapt to the requirements of their subjects fall into the categories of choosing textbooks, reading comprehension, PQ4R (preview, question, read, write, recall, and review), vocabulary, taking notes and using them for study, testing, and papers and reports. (Author/TJ)

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Abstract

READING IN THE CONTENT AREAS: SUGGESTIONS FOR INSERVICE TRAINING OF CONTENT AREA INSTRUCTORS

Increasing numbers of students now attending college lack the reading and study skills necessary for mastery of content area material. One approach to solving this problem is using learning assistance personnel as consultants to content area instructors. This paper outlines some specific reading/study techniques which the learning assistance instructor can help the content area instructor adapt to the requirements of his/her subject. These techniques fall into the following seven categories: (1) choosing textbooks, (2) reading comprehension, (3) PQ4R, (4) vocabulary, (5) taking notes and using them for study, (6) testing, and (7) papers and reports.

The need to adapt instruction to the non-traditional student population currently in college has given rise to a variety of learning assistance approaches: courses in reading and study improvement, learning centers, peer tutoring, adjunct courses, and the like. Because learning centers are usually understaffed, and because the skills learned in one context do not always transfer to specific content areas, an approach which utilizes learning assistance personnel as consultants to content area instructors to enable them to teach the reading and study skills necessary for the mastery of their particular course material may sometimes be more efficient than providing direct service to the students. The suggestions incorporated in this paper were developed out of the author's own experience as a content area instructor in a community college outreach program which served students who were academically unprepared.

Choosing Textbooks

Readability

Instructors should be made aware of the discrepancy between the reading levels attained by their students and the readability levels of college textbooks. The Fry Readability Formula has recently been

extended to Grade 17 and is quick and easy to use (2). Instructors should be cautioned, however, that since readability formulae do not take into account the proportion of unfamiliar concepts contained in the text or the clarity or interest level of their presentation, a low reading grade level is not the only criterion for choosing a textbook.

Study Guides

Textbooks which are accompanied by study guides can be helpful to students in preparing for tests, but a study guide should be evaluated in terms of whether or not the content and the format of questions are similar to those which will appear on tests.

Reading Comprehension

Students are able to comprehend textbooks which are above their normal reading levels when sufficient direction is provided. One way of providing direction is to give students a list of objectives, specifying what they are expected to learn from their reading. If the objectives are discussed in class after students have completed the reading assignment, students will have the opportunity to evaluate their responses and obtain answers to their questions.

If the reading assignment requires thinking skills at a higher level than comprehension and memory, a more specific guide should be provided. Following is a sample reading guide for comparison and contrast

of three theories of personality. Students are instructed to fill in the blank cells.

	Freudian	Behaviorist	Humanist
What is their view of human nature (good, bad, neutral)?			
Are they deterministic?			
How adequate is their research support?			
What do they believe to be the cause of psychological problems?			
What is their theory of personality development?			
What do they consider to be the most important motives?			
How do they explain conscience?			

The type of reading guide provided by the instructor should be related to the type of questions which will appear on tests.

PQ4R (3)

The PQ4R method of studying textbooks is an adaptation of SQ3R (4) which adds underlining and the construction of recall items in the margin. Perhaps the greatest virtue of both PQ4R and SQ3R is that they separ-

ate comprehension from memorization. Both students and instructors are often unaware that it is not possible to comprehend and memorize at the same time when the material is difficult. In PQ4R, the student first previews the portion of the assignment which he or she intents to study in one session. The student then selects the first major heading for the Q, R, R, and R steps.

Preview, Question, Read

The first three steps of PQ4R, Preview, Question, and Read, are identical to those in SQ3R. Instructors can cause students to actually use the steps, however, if they give practice activities such as comprehension questions following the Preview step and guided discussion of their responses to the Question step.

Write

The second "R", Write, follows the Read step. Students can be advised of the futility of excessive underlining and practice can be given underlining several paragraphs. After students have underlined (or highlighted), they should write a self-test item in the margin for each idea they want to memeorize. Examples of self-test items are "def. of learning" and "3 types of hormones". Since students rarely construct appropriate self-test items without practice, their responses should be discussed in class.

Recall

Following the Write step, the students will do the Recall step, using their self-test items for memorization. Difficult words and concepts can be placed on 3 x 5 cards for frequent review. The QRRR steps should be repeated for each heading to be covered in the study session.

Review

On completion of all the sections the student performs the review step, consisting of using the self-test items for the entire assignment, to tie all the concepts together. The review step for each reading assignment should be repeated periodically throughout the term, so material will not be forgotten.

Vocabulary

Difficult or technical words should be introduced be the instructor before each reading assignment and, if necessary, students should be advised to put the words on 3 x 5 cards for frequent review. Students should be encouraged to use context whenever possible to decipher the meaning of unfamiliar words. If the book has a glossary, the instructor should discuss with the class its usefulness in studying for tests. Structural analysis is a particularly effective way of learning vocabulary since the word parts serve as mnemonic devices. The words in the following sample handout were taken from one chapter in a text for Introductory Psychology (1).

Word Part	Definition	Words from this Chapter
schiz phrenic	split, division of the mind, mental	schizophrenia
mania	mental disorder characterized by excessive activity	manic-depressive
psych	of the mind, mental	psychosurgery psychodynamic
osis	state, condition	psychosis
neuro	of the nerves	neurosis
path	suffering, disease	psychopathology psychopath
phobia	fear, hatred	claustrophobia
socio	social, society	sociopath
soma	body	somatic delusion psychosomatic
anti	against	antisocial personality

Taking Notes and Using Them for Study

If students need practice in notetaking, the instructor could pass out blank or partially-completed outlines for his or her lectures, so students can grasp the relations between ideas in visual form. A good method for studying notes utilizes the same techniques of underlining, the use of a self-test column, and periodic review that were discussed under PQ4R.

Testing

Academically unprepared students should be tested very frequently, both to give them practice in study and test-taking skills and to provide motivation to keep up with the reading. If each test covers the content of

the entire course to date, rather than just the material since the last test, the students will be more likely to review previously-learned material. Types of exam questions should be related to the guides provided by the instructor for the reading and lecture notes.

Students can be taught the general techniques for preparing for and taking exams, and returned tests can serve as bases for each student's analysis of his or her test-taking techniques. A questionnaire such as the following can serve as a diagnostic tool, and class discussion can provide suggestions for methods of remedying weaknesses.

EXAM ANALYSIS

_____ Did my self-test items cover what was on the test?

_____ Did I remember everything I tested myself on?

_____ Did I follow directions properly?

_____ Did I distribute my time properly?

_____ Did I answer the easy questions first?

_____ Did I make educated guesses?

_____ Did I read all the alternatives before making a choice?

_____ Did I outline all essay questions before writing?

_____ Did I check all my answers before turning in the test?

_____ If I changed any answers, did I get more points or fewer points than if I hadn't changed them?

Papers and Reports

Papers and reports should be broken into small steps, each with its deadline, so the instructor can

provide guidance and feedback concerning the skills involved at each step. Suggested steps are (1) choosing the topic, (2) making a preliminary search for material, (3) narrowing the topic, (4) compiling a bibliography, (5) making a tentative outline, (6) making up a tentative thesis statement, (7) writing the first draft, (8) revising the draft, (9) footnoting, and (10) final draft. Instructors should be very specific about the requirements for each step. For example, the reference books and periodical indexes to be used might be specified. Instructors might arrange for a librarian to give the class a tour of the library and directions for the use of the card catalog, periodical indexes, and the reference collection. Forms could be provided for the collection of bibliographic data.

Summary

Instructors in the content areas can be prepared via inservice training by learning assistance personnel to teach the reading and study skills necessary for the mastery of their particular subject areas. Suggested topics for training sessions include (1) choosing textbooks, (2) reading comprehension, (3) PQ4R, (4) vocabulary, (5) taking notes and using them for study, (6) testing, and (7) papers and reports.

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